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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MINSK 000294

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: COALITION STRUGGLES TO OVERCOME IMPASSE ON  
DEMOCRATIC CONGRESS

REF: A. MINSK 289

- [1](#)B. MINSK 286
- [1](#)C. MINSK 177
- [1](#)D. 2006 MINSK 1221

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) We are seeing gathering indications of disagreement in Belarus' democratic opposition. Belarusian Party of Communists Head Kalyakin warned of a potential split in the coalition in the next week if the parties fail to reach a compromise with coalition leader Milinkevich's camp on procedures for selecting the chair of the coalition's Political Council (PC). "For Freedom" Movement Deputy Korniyenko rejected United Civic Party Head Lebedko's proposal that the PC elect the opposition's leader, arguing instead that an election at the next congress would provide more legitimacy. Party leaders complained of de facto democratic coalition leader Milinkevich's frequent use of ultimatums to stymie coalition cooperation. The only point of reported progress was the coalition's unanimous adoption of the coalition's common message and action plans. End summary.

BPC Ready to Move Forward Without Milinkevich...

[1](#)2. (C) At a lunch hosted by Ambassador for coalition leaders and their deputies on April 4, pro-opposition Belarusian Party of Communists (BPC) Chair Sergey Kalyakin urged his fellow party leaders to resolve the questions of leadership and coalition structure before the congress. He vehemently disagreed with de facto United Democratic Forces (UDF) Head Aleksandr Milinkevich's previous suggestion that the coalition should have a "strong leader" with a vertical power structure. Arguing that such a structure only replicates the organization of the Lukashenko regime, Kalyakin added that each of the opposition parties are distinct institutions with "individual agendas and ambitions" that, barring national events like presidential elections, cannot exist in a hierarchical power structure.

[1](#)3. (C) Kalyakin predicted that the coalition would likely split into two or three factions if the leaders cannot reach a compromise on the democratic congress and other issues "in the coming week." (Note: Coalition leaders, with the possible exception of Milinkevich, will take part in meetings organized by U.S. NGO IRI on April 11-12. The main topic of discussion will be the congress. End note.) He said the factions would include: 1) Milinkevich and his supporters; 2) BPC, United Civic Party (UCP), Belarusian Social Democratic

Party (BSDP) "Gramada", Labor Party, and Nadzeya; and possibly 3) Belarusian National Front (BNF), although Kalyakin noted he was not sure where BNF stood. Without clearly stating BNF's position, BNF Deputy Viktor Ivashkevich, too, warned of the potential split in the coalition and urged the party leaders and Milinkevich to resolve immediately their differences.

...But BNF Is Not  
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14. (C) BNF Chair Vintsuk Vyachorka and UDF leader Milinkevich did not attend Ambassador's lunch because they were at Vyachorka's trial (ref A), but Ambassador sought a separate meeting with Vyachorka on April 6. Vyachorka made it clear that his party would not participate in a congress without the UDF leader, arguing that to do so would be deeply divisive for the BNF and that the coalition must take advantage of Milinkevich, one of its greatest assets. As head of the coalition's special committee for reaching a compromise on the congress, Vyachorka explained that the egos of the leaders are preventing them from agreeing on any of the proposed compromise plans.

15. (C) Vyachorka noted that the latest proposal, put forth by his deputy Ivashkevich, involves dissolving the PC and establishing an informal coordinating body comprised of the leaders of the main opposition parties and Milinkevich. Each leader would oversee a joint committee responsible for implementing certain parts of the coalition action plan, such as street demonstrations, the "For Freedom" campaign, and dialogue with the "elites." Vyachorka said he has yet to hear from Milinkevich or the party leaders on this proposal; he expects it will be raised in Vilnius April 11-12. Regardless of the outcome of the latest proposal, Vyachorka

MINSK 00000294 002 OF 003

doubted Kalyakin would move forward with the congress without Milinkevich or BNF. He added that UCP Chair Lebedko would ultimately be forced to withdraw from such a congress as well, given that many members of his party, especially in the regions, identify more closely with Milinkevich.

UCP and BSDP: Political Council Should Select Leader  
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16. (C) During the lunch, Lebedko suggested that if the political parties are reluctant to agree to Vyachorka's original proposal to have the congress elect the chair of the coalition's Political Council (PC) (ref B), then the PC should elect the leader. BSDP Chair Anatoliy Levkovich stressed that his party backs this proposal and noted that the PC could even guarantee Milinkevich that he would be reelected chairperson, but only if Milinkevich would be willing to be accountable to the PC. Lebedko also proposed to expand the number of PC members from 15 to 40 to give NGO and regional party representatives a voice in the coalition decision-making process, thus increasing both communication and cooperation with the regions. Levkovich chimed in again, noting that the delegates at the congress would elect the PC.

In order to widen the congress base per Milinkevich's earlier demands (ref C), Levkovich suggested adding VIPs from civil society and NGOs to the delegate list.

Korniyenko: Congress Provides Legitimacy to Leader  
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17. (C) While supporting the idea to include more regional voices in the congress and on the PC, Milinkevich deputy Viktor Korniyenko rejected the rest of Lebedko's proposal. Korniyenko insisted that the congress, not the PC, should elect the leader of the coalition, which, he stressed, did not necessarily have to be Milinkevich. Korniyenko argued that a congress provides legitimacy to the leader's authority and makes him beholden to his electorate. If a leader knew he could be removed by a PC vote, then the leader has less

accountability to and ownership of the position.

¶18. (C) In a separate conversation with Pol/Econ Chief on April 5, Korniyenko was deeply worried that if Milinkevich agreed to Lebedko's proposal, Milinkevich's tenure as PC chairman would inevitably come to a halt or be dictated by the leftist tendencies of Kalyakin and company. He said he would recommend to Milinkevich to reject the proposal and focus on closer cooperation with BNF and members of other parties in the regions. Korniyenko also found Ivashkevich's compromise plan of devolving the PC into a loose coordinating body more acceptable and would study it further. Ostensibly, Milinkevich will reach a decision on this next week.

#### Milinkevich Should Stop Ultimatums and Poaching Activists

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¶19. (C) According to Ivashkevich, Milinkevich created much hostility among the other party leaders by using regional trips and independent media outlets to try to recruit members of other parties to join his own unregistered "For Freedom" Movement (ref D). Korniyenko defended Milinkevich's actions by arguing that activists can be a member of both "For Freedom" Movement and a political party without conflict of interest. Korniyenko complained that it is unfair of party leaders to attempt to restrict Milinkevich's meetings in the regions with supporters who are seeking a "positive alternative to the regime."

¶10. (C) Lebedko expressed his frustration with Milinkevich's frequent use of ultimatums to attempt to hijack power from the other party leaders which has created much distrust among the opposition. Lebedko suggested that Milinkevich work to rebuild that trust with good-faith gestures, including participating in common actions such as the congress.

#### Common Action Plan And Strategy Ready for Implementation

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¶11. (C) Coalition leaders reported one point of progress: the PC unanimously adopted the final versions of the coalition's Small Constitution, the plan for economic reform and the action plan. These documents outline the coalition's strategy until 2008. Now the coalition must work on distributing the documents to Belarusians and implementing the action plan. It is the UDF's intention to present these at the congress. Vyachorka did note that should all efforts at holding a congress come to naught by June, the UDF would likely then work to distribute these documents to activists and civil society around the country.

MINSK 00000294 003 OF 003

#### Comment

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¶12. (C) Despite the calls for unity from the party deputies, the coalition leadership is reaching an impasse. This turn of events is no surprise, and is largely predicated on the personal ambitions of the party leaders and Milinkevich's aloof and indecisive approach to leadership. Even Korniyenko, Milinkevich's strongest supporter at the lunch, openly regretted that Milinkevich had not traveled to Washington in late February with the UDF leaders. If the coalition groups are not willing to accept the proposals submitted by Vyachorka, Lebedko, or Ivashkevich, then a compromise between the two sides is doubtful, particularly without an impending national event such as upcoming elections to force the democratic forces to cooperate. A congress that includes only some of the opposition political parties would not merit moral (or financial) support.

¶13. (C) We will continue to reach out to Milinkevich's group and the parties to see if there is any further room for compromise. We should keep in mind that all the members of the opposition continue to point to Lukashenko as their

number one enemy, and not to each other. Even if the coalition does split into two (or more) factions, the groups will likely maintain some level of cooperation in organizing annual street events (such as the March 25 Independence Day and the April 26 Chernobyl demonstrations).

Moore